

# Kiowa language

**Kiowa** /ˈkaɪ.əwə/ or **Cáuijògà/Cáuijò:gyà** ("language of the Cáuigù (Kiowa)") is a Tanoan language spoken by the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma in primarily Caddo, Kiowa, and Comanche counties. The Kiowa tribal center is located in Carnegie. Like most North American languages, Kiowa is an endangered language.

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## Origins

Although Kiowa is most closely related to the other Tanoan languages of the Pueblos, the earliest historic location of its speakers is western Montana around 1700. Prior to the historic record, oral histories, archaeology, and linguistics suggest that pre-Kiowa was the northernmost dialect of Proto-Kiowa-Tanoan, spoken at Late Basketmaker II Era sites. Around AD 450, they migrated northward through the territory of the Anasazi and Great Basin, occupying the eastern Fremont culture region of the Colorado Plateau until sometime before 1300. Speakers then drifted northward to the northwestern Plains, arriving no later than the mid-16th century in the Yellowstone area where the Kiowa were first encountered by Europeans. The Kiowa then later migrated to the Black Hills and the southern Plains, where the language was recorded in historic times.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Demographics

Colorado College anthropologist Laurel Watkins noted in 1984 based on Parker McKenzie's estimates that only about 400 people (mostly over the age of 50) could speak Kiowa and that only rarely were children learning language. A more recent figure from McKenzie is 300 adult speakers of "varying degrees of

Kiowa	
Cáuijògà/Cáuijò:gyà	
Native to	United States
Region	western Oklahoma
Ethnicity	Kiowa people
Native speakers	20 <span> </span> (2007) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	<div>Tanoan <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li> <b>Kiowa</b></li></ul></div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	kio
Glottolog	kiow1266 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/kiow1266) <sup>[2]</sup>
Linguasphere	64-CBB-a
<span></span> <div>Distribution of the Kiowa language after migration to the Southern Plains</div>	

fluency" reported by Mithun (1999) out of a 12,242 Kiowa tribal membership (US Census 2000).

The Intertribal Wordpath Society, a nonprofit group dedicated to preserving native languages of Oklahoma, estimates the maximum number of fluent Kiowa speakers as of 2006 to be 400.<sup>[4]</sup> A 2013 newspaper article estimated 100 fluent speakers.<sup>[5]</sup> UNESCO classifies Kiowa as 'severely endangered.' It claims the language had only 20 mother-tongue speakers in 2007, along with 80 second language speakers, most of whom were between the ages of 45 and 60.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Classes and revitalization efforts

The University of Tulsa, the University of Oklahoma in Norman, and the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha offer Kiowa language classes.

Kiowa hymns are sung at Mount Scott Kiowa United Methodist Church.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Kiowa Tribe offered weekly language classes at the Jacobson House, a nonprofit Native American art center in Norman, Oklahoma. Dane Poolaw and Carol Williams taught the language using Parker McKenzie's method.<sup>[7]</sup>

Alecia Gonzales (Kiowa/Apache, 1926–2011), who taught at USAO, wrote a Kiowa teaching grammar called *Thaum khoiye tdoen gyah: beginning Kiowa language*. Modina Toppah Water (Kiowa) edited *Saynday Kiowa Indian Children's Stories*, a Kiowa language book of trickster stories published in 2013.<sup>[5][8]</sup>

## Phonology

There are 23 consonants:

			Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal		<u>m</u>	<u>n</u>				
Stop/ affricate	voiceless /voiced	<u>p</u> <u>b</u>	<u>t</u> <u>d</u>	<u>ts</u>		<u>k</u> <u>g</u>	<u>ʔ</u>
	aspirated	p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>			k <sup>h</sup>	
	ejective	<u>p'</u>	<u>t'</u>	<u>ts'</u>		<u>k'</u>	
Fricative	voiceless /voiced			<u>s</u> <u>z</u>			<u>h</u>
Approximant		(w)	l		j		

Kiowa distinguishes six vowel qualities, with three distinctive levels of height and a front-back contrast. All six vowels may be long or short, oral or nasal. Four of the vowels occur as diphthongs with a high front off-glide of the form *vowel* + /j/.

There are 24 vowels:

Monophthongs						Diphthongs		
		Front		Back			Front	Back
		short	long	short	long	High		uj
Close	oral	i	i:	u	u:	Mid		oj

	nasal	ĩ	ĩ:	ũ	ũ:	Low	aj	ɔj
Mid	oral	e	e:	o	o:			
	nasal	ẽ	ẽ:	õ	õ:			
Open	oral	a	a:	ɔ	ɔ:			
	nasal	ã	ã:	õ	õ:			

Contrasts among the consonants are easily demonstrated with an abundance of minimal and near-minimal pairs. There is no contrast between the presence of an initial glottal stop and its absence.

IPA	Example	Meaning
/p' /	/p' í/	'female's sister'
/p <sup>h</sup> /	/p <sup>h</sup> í/	'fire; hill; heavy'
/p/	/pĩ/	'food eating'
/b/	/bĩ/	'foggy'
/t' /	/t' áp/	'deer'
/t <sup>h</sup> /	/t <sup>h</sup> áp/	'dry'
/t/	/tá/	'eye'

The ejective and aspirated stops are articulated forcefully. The unaspirated voiceless stops are tense, while the voiced stops are lax.

The voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ is pronounced [ʃ] before /j/

Orthography	Pronunciation	Meaning
sét	[sét]	'bear'
syân	[ʃɛn ʔ]	'be small'
sân	[sân ʔ]	'child'

The lateral /l/ is realized as [l] in syllable-initial position, as lightly affricated [ɭ] in syllable-final position, and slightly devoiced in utterance-final position. It occurs seldom in word-initial position.

cêlê	[sé: ɲlê ɲ]	'set'
gúldɔ	[gúɭdɔ]	'be red, painted'
sál	[sáɭ]	'be hot'

The dental resonants /l/ and /n/ are palatalized before /i/.

t <sup>h</sup> àlí	[t <sup>h</sup> àl <sup>j</sup> í]	'boy'
bõnî	[bõ <sup>w</sup> n <sup>j</sup> î]	'see'

All consonants may begin a syllable but /l/ may not occur word-initially outside of loan-words (/la.yãñ/ 'lion'). The only consonants which may terminate a syllable are /p, t, m, n, l, j/.

Certain sequences of consonant and vowel do not occur: dental and alveolar obstruents preceding /i/ (\*t' i, t<sup>h</sup> i, ti, di, si, zi); velars and /j/ preceding /e/ (\*k' e, k<sup>h</sup> e, ke, ge, je). These sequences do occur if they are the result of contraction: /hègɔ èm hâ/ [hègèm hâ] 'then he got up'

The glide /j/ automatically occurs between all velars and /a/, except if they are together as the result of a conjunction (/hègɔ á bõ:/ [hègá bõ:] 'then he saw them'), or in loanwords ([kánò] 'American' >Sp. *Americano*).

Nasalization of voiced stops operates automatically only within the domain of the pronominal prefixes: voiced stops become the corresponding nasals either preceding or following a nasal. The velar nasal that is derived from /g/ is deleted; there is no /ŋ/ in Kiowa.

Underlying //ia// surfaces in alternating forms as /ja/ following velars, as /a/ following labials and as /i:/ if accompanied by falling tone.

Obstruents are devoiced in two environments: in syllable-final position and following a voiceless obstruent. Voiced stops are devoiced in syllable-final position without exception. In effect, the rule applies only to /b/ and /d/ since velars are prohibited in final position.

The palatal glide /j/ spreads across the laryngeals /h/ and /ʔ/, yielding a glide onset, a brief moment of coarticulation and a glide release. The laryngeals /h/ and /ʔ/ are variably deleted between sonorants, which also applies across a word boundary.

## Orthography

Kiowa orthography was developed by native speaker Parker McKenzie, who had worked with J. P. Harrington and later with other linguists. The development of the orthography is detailed in Meadows & McKenzie (2001). The tables below show each orthographic symbol used in the Kiowa writing system and its corresponding phonetic value (written IPA).

Vowels

Orthography	Pronunciation	Orthography	Pronunciation
<b>a</b>	a	<b>ai</b>	aj
<b>au</b>	ɔ	<b>au</b>	ɔj
<b>e</b>	e		
<b>i</b>	i		
<b>o</b>	o	<b>oi</b>	oj
<b>u</b>	u	<b>ui</b>	uj

The mid-back vowel /ɔ/ is indicated by a digraph ⟨au⟩. The four diphthongs indicate the offglide /j/ with the letter ⟨i⟩ following the main vowel. Nasal vowels are indicated by underlining the vowel letter: nasal o is thus ⟨o⟩. Long vowels are indicated with macron diacritics: long o is thus ⟨o⟩. Short vowels are unmarked. Tone is indicated with diacritics. The acute accent ⟨´⟩ represents high tone, the grave accent ⟨`⟩ indicates low tone, and the circumflex ⟨^⟩ indicates falling tone, exemplified on the vowel o as ⟨ó⟩ (high), ⟨ò⟩ (low), ⟨ô⟩ (falling). Since long vowels also have tones, the vowel symbols can have both a macron and a tone diacritic above the macron: ⟨ố⟩ (long high), ⟨ồ⟩ (long low), ⟨ô̂⟩ (long falling).

## Consonants

Orthography	Pronunciation	Orthography	Pronunciation
<b>b</b>	b	<b>ch</b>	ts
<b>f</b>	p	<b>x</b>	ts'
<b>p</b>	p <sup>h</sup>	<b>s</b>	s
<b>v</b>	p'	<b>z</b>	z
<b>d</b>	d	<b>l</b>	l
<b>j</b>	t	<b>y</b>	j
<b>t</b>	t <sup>h</sup>	<b>w</b>	w
<b>th</b>	t'	<b>h</b>	h
<b>g</b>	g	<b>m</b>	m
<b>c</b>	k	<b>n</b>	n
<b>k</b>	k <sup>h</sup>		
<b>q</b>	k'		

The palatal glide [j] that is pronounced after velar consonants ⟨g, c, k, q⟩ (which are phonetically /g, k, k<sup>h</sup>, k' /, respectively) is not normally written.<sup>[9]</sup> There are, however, a few exceptions where [g] is not followed by a [j] glide, in which case an apostrophe ⟨'⟩ is written after the *g* as ⟨g'⟩. Thus, there is, for example, ⟨ga⟩ which is pronounced [gja] and ⟨g'a⟩ which is pronounced [ga]. The glottal stop /ʔ/ is also not written as it is often deleted and its presence is predictable. A final convention is that pronominal prefixes are written as separate words instead of being attached to verbs.

Like many scripts of India, such as Devanagari, the Kiowa alphabet is ordered according to mostly phonetic principles. The alphabetical order is shown in the tables above: Vowels first, then consonants, reading down the columns, left column then right.

## Morphology

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### Nouns

#### Number inflection

Kiowa, like other Tanoan languages, is characterized by an inverse number system. Kiowa has four noun classes. Class I nouns are inherently singular/dual, Class II nouns are inherently dual/plural, Class III nouns are inherently dual, and Class IV nouns are mass or noncount nouns. If the number of a noun is different from its class's inherent value, the noun takes the suffix *-gau* (or a variant).

class	singular	dual	plural
<b>I</b>	—	—	-gau
<b>II</b>	-gau	—	—
<b>III</b>	-gau	—	-gau

IV	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)
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Mithun (1999:445) gives as an example *chĕ* "horse/two horses" (Class I) made plural with the addition of *-gau*: *chĕgau* "horses". On the other hand, the Class II noun *tĕsè* "bones/two bones" is made singular by suffixing *-gau*: *tĕsègau* "bone."

## Verbs

Kiowa verbs consist of verb stems that can be preceded by prefixes, followed by suffixes, and incorporate other lexical stems into the verb complex. Kiowa verbs have a complex active-stative pronominal system expressed via prefixes, which can be followed by incorporated nouns, verbs, or adverbs. Following the main verb stem are suffixes that indicate tense/aspect and mode. A final group of suffixes that pertain to clausal relations can follow the tense-aspect-modal suffixes. These syntactic suffixes include relativizers, subordinating conjunctions, and switch-reference indicators. A skeletal representation of the Kiowa verb structure can be represented as the following:



The pronominal prefixes and tense/aspect-modal suffixes are inflectional and required to be present on every verb.

## Pronominal inflection

Kiowa verb stems are inflected with prefixes that indicate:

1. grammatical person
2. grammatical number
3. semantic roles of animate participants

All these of the categories are indicated for only the *primary* animate participant. If there is also a second participant (such as in transitive sentences), the number of the second participant is also indicated. A participant is primary in the following cases:

- A volitional agent participant (i.e. the doer of the action who also has control over the action) is primary if it is the only participant in the clause.
- In two-participant volitional agent/non-agent clauses:
  1. The non-agent participant is primary when
    - the non-agent is not in the first person singular or third person singular AND
    - the volitional agent is singular
  2. The volitional agent participant is primary when
    - the non-agent is in the first person singular or third person singular AND
    - the volitional agent is non-singular

The term *non-agent* here refers to semantic roles including involitional agents, patients, beneficiaries, recipients, experiencers, and possessors.

Intransitive verbs

	Number		
Person	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st	à-		è-
2nd	èm-	mà-	bà-
3rd	–	è-	á-
Inverse	è-		

Agent transitive verbs

	Volitional Agent Primary Person-Number							
Non-agent Number	1st-Sg.	2nd-Sg.	2nd-Dual	2nd-Pl.	3rd-Sg.	3rd-Dual	1st-Sg./Dual 3rd-Pl.	3rd-Inverse
Sg.	gà-	à-	má-`-	bá-`-	–	é-`-	á-`-	é-`-
Dual	nèn-	mèn-	mén-	bèj-	è-	én-	èj-	èj-
Pl.	gàj-	bàj-	mán-`-	báj-`-	gà-	én-`-	gá-`-	éj-`-
Inverse	dé-	bé-	mén-`-	béj-	é-	én-	è-	éj-

## Notes

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## External links

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- [The Power of Kiowa Song: A Collaborative Ethnography](https://archive.today/20121202084135/http://www.uapress.arizona.edu/lib/cache/excerpts/kiowa/kiowasng.htm) (<https://archive.today/20121202084135/http://www.uapress.arizona.edu/lib/cache/excerpts/kiowa/kiowasng.htm>)
  - [Vocabulary of the Kiowa Language](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x001726200&view=1up&seq=5&q1=tea) (<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x001726200&view=1up&seq=5&q1=tea>) , John P. Harrington, 1928; full book digitized by Google, public domain in the US
    - [A Grammar of Kiowa: Appendix 3: Orthographies](#) , Laurel J. Watkins, 1984; writing systems for Kiowa
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